Markers of Stereotyped Communication

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Rezumat: *Stereotipurile de comunicare sunt caracteristice atât persoanelor cât comunităţilor şi funcţiile pe care acest tip de comunicare le poate îndeplini sunt fie legate de modul de organizare al discursului fie de construcţia categoriilor de gen, vârstă sau identitate socială. Stereotipurile pot fi cosiderate, uneori, elemente care marchează apatenenţa la un anumit grup, statut sau gen iar studierea mecanismelor de formare şi proliferare ale acestora constituie întotdeauna o provocare. Discuţia stereotipurilor de comunicare ar trebui să graviteze în jurul unor aspecte precum vorbire specifică unui grup, folosire conştientă sau inconştientă a automatismelor de limbaj şi influenţa contextului social asupra dobândirii abilităţilor conversaţionale. Comunicarea stereotipică poate fi considerată o ideologie lingvistică propagată (conştient sau inconştient) de către vorbitori atăt in conversaţii uzuale cât şi în comunicarea în cadru institutional. Această lucrare are ca scop descoperirea elementelor care indică existenţa unei comunicări streotipe în conversaţia uzuală, naraţiuni şi interviuri.*
Cuvinte cheie: *stereotip, context lingvistic, ideologie lingvistică*

1. Introduction

The discussion of stereotyped communication should revolve around aspects such as in-group linguistic practice, unconscious use of linguistic automatisms and the influence of social context in acquiring conversation abilities and not around biased mental representations of otherness or issues of group belonging. If with stereotypes in general we can speak about a system of beliefs that sometimes creates inter-group rivalry, with stereotyped communication we should only speak about non-biased verbally transmitted practice. This paper analyzes the stereotypical manner of using discourse markers *like* and *cos* in teenage talk and views stereotyped communication not as a statement of identity or membership from which people draw personal pride, according to Kramsch's (1998:65) analysis of this phenomenon but as an almost unconscious acquisition of talk patterns.

Consequently this paper locates the roots of stereotyped use of discourse markers in the peer conversational practice that fashions the manner in which teenagers add new stereotypical uses of markers. Since conversation is a social practice, it is exactly by means of this social practice that the stereotypical use of markers is unconsciously proffered but although this is not a goal *per se* we can state that the intra-group similarities are accentuated.

Redeker (2006) speaks about *discourse operators* i.e. discourse markers having discourse structuring functions. Mainly coherence-oriented, *discourse operators* are those expressions that are used with the primary function of bringing to the listener's attention a particular kind of relation between discourse and the discourse context. The latter is not necessarily a linguistic one. The fact that discourse markers 'point' to an internal text or external co-text, testifies to their indexicality. *Like* and *cos* can be said to pertain to the category of discourse operators since their function is that of pointing either to parenthetically placed speech reporting or to some external co-text reference.

2. Discourse markers as cues to direct listener's attention

According to Redeker's (2006) classification discussed above, there are two categories of discourse markers: *discourse particles* and *discourse operators*. The present discussion will concentrate on the latter. In point of function, discourse operators are said to have a connective function as well as a function of marking transition between discourse segments. Redeker expands on the latter function and devises a very interesting theory with practical application within conversational analysis.

Thus, discourse markers that signal segment transitions function as cues to direct listener's attention (probably towards the right interpretation of the type of transition that is to take place). Redeker (2006:344) speaks about two types of segment transitions that discourse markers signal: *paratactic transitions* (segments that follow each other at the same level: lists of topics and subtopics) and *hypotactic transitions* (interruption or suspension of

an incomplete unit with parenthetical material: digressions, interruptions. In teenage talk, the two discourse markers can be said to fulfil the both functions as they can signal both discourse continuation and digressions.

Further on, Redeker (2006:345) enumerates the specific discourse markers that could fulfil the function of signalling various types of segment transitions. End of segment is signalled by *okay?, you know, so*; next segment by *okay, so, but, now, well, and*; digression and interruption by *you know, by the way*; specification, definition by *that is, you know, well*; paraphrase by *I mean, you know, that is*; exemplification, clarification by *because, you know, I mean*; background information by *because, see, well*; comment: *you know, I think, I guess*; correction, emendation: *oh, or, I mean*; quote: *you know, like, well, oh*; return: *but (anyway), so, now, well*.

We can claim that Redeker's approach is a valuable one because any analysis of discourse markers has to be aware of the fact that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between a marker and a function that it can fulfil especially within teenage talk. Redeker is obviously aware of that because, as we can notice, markers are said to be signalling several types of segment transitions. *You know*, for instance, is included in seven categories. Certainly, there may be refinements of this theory in the sense of discovering new types of segment transitions but I believe that the basic types are already covered by Redeker's account.

3. The social function of discourse markers

Schiffrin (1996) is one of the authors who advocate for the social function of language. Schiffrin states that language is used to accomplish social actions such as boasting, threatening, confiding, insulting, etc. There is one point, however, in relation to which Schiffrin expresses doubt and that is the ability of markers to signal social status differences among speakers.

Although we cannot safely claim that markers signal social status differences (this is the object of future research), we can say that they vary across geographical areas, age, gender and sometimes function as stereotypical means of achieving conversational goals. In the Romanian space we can only think of the attention seeking marker 'fată' which is used when addressing a woman in an informal conversation. This marker is commonly used in the Southern part of Romania whereas in the central part of the country, 'fată' is replaced by 'tu' which fulfils basically the same functions. And the list of examples could be longer.

Thus, speakers from the same group may operate (consciously or unconsciously) the same choices when it comes to using markers in certain situations. Different choices of markers can be detected in male or female discourse or with educated people and people who have not benefited from consistent educational instruction.

Also, age difference is an important coordinate of markers use. Stenström (1998) conducted an analysis of *cos* (because) in teenage talk and discovered that the functions of the reduced form *cos* within teenage discourse has considerably different functions than the full form *because*. Moreover, more frequently in teenage discourse, *cos* has the role of discourse marker and not of grammatical subordinator. Among the functions that teenagers assign to this marker in conversation are those of 'continuation signal' or 'take-off' for further talk.

The latter function is illustrated by the first example provided by Stenström (1998) in which one instance of cos' serves as take-off to introduce further information:

1. Beth: Go and tell Black.
   Marie: Just [go]
   Celia: [I was] gonna but I, I thought, I thought if Black sees me when I come in, *cos I had make up all down my face cos I'd been so*

upset, I got so [angry with the whole thing].
Marie: [Mm.Yeah]
(in Stenström 1998:128).

Since the second *cos* is used as a subordinating conjunction introducing a causal clause, the functional criterion indicates the fact that only the first *cos* has a discourse marking function. In this example, *cos* has a formally paratactic and functionally hypotactic function since its role is that of presenting a digression in the guise of a causal clause.

In the second example *cos* has an explanatory function in the sense that it motivates an assertion and continues the turn with relevant experience of the speaker:

2. Marie: I'm gonna lose my voice, I think I wanna be ill actually so I can go home and don't, don't come back.
Beth : You don't wanna be ill *cos when I was admitted to the san I nearly died*, I tried everything to get out the san [and she just wouldn't]
Marie: [I know, mm I think I'll just stay at home.]
(in Stenström 1998:128).

In this example *cos* has a formally hypotactic function and a functionally paratactic one. That is because although the unit that is introduced by *cos* seems to be a parenthetically placed digression it is actually meant to motivate the first part of the answer 'You don't wanna be ill'.

Similarly, Andersen (1998:168)) claims that *like* is functionally different in teenage talk in the sense that it contributes to the relevance of utterances by signalling the fact that the speaker aims at reducing processing effort but at the same time ensuring relevance by giving a loose interpretation of their thought.

An example in this sense is provided in Andersen (1998:158). The discussion takes place between three teenage girls and the subject is the correct French form of some cake that is to be used in translation:

Sarah: How do you say, would you like some cake?
Charita: Erm, can't do that.
Sarah: It is something like, Tu ni (sic) vous pas de gateau?
Charita : Yeah, le gat, yeah something (…)
Sarah: So how do you say, je, a cake.
Kate: I've got it.
Sarah: Ah, right, je vo=, (…)
Kate : *I thought it was like the whole cake, not the little*
Sarah: Alright, so du gateau yeah? … Ah, French is crap.
(in Andersen, 1998:158)

In this excerpt *like* functions as a mitigating device which tentatively introduces the speaker's opinion. Perhaps that we can agree with Andersen in the claim that *like* is a looseness marker that is a less-than-literal rendering of a speaker's thought. It seems however that the tentative use of *like* is meant to signal awareness of a possibly wrong answer and this assumption is supported by the presence of 'I thought' instead of, for instance, 'I know' or 'I'm sure that'.

Romaine and Lange (1998:240) refer to the teenagers' use of *like* to mark reported speech and thought. They claim that teenagers use *like* to illustrate in a dramatic manner the thoughts, imagined reactions or imagined mimicry of the people whose speech they are reporting.

The first example illustrates the use of *like* as a marker of reported speech and the second its use as a marker of reported thought:

1. She said, "what are you doing here?"
And I'm LIKE, "Nothing much," y'know. I explained the whole … weird story.
And she's LIKE "Um … Well, that's cool."
(in Romaine & Lange 1998:240)

2. She goes, "Mom wants to talk to you." It's LIKE, "Hah, hah. You're about to get in trouble.
(in Romaine & Lange 1998:243)

The last example is a quotation of what the speaker imagines to be the thoughts of the person she is referring to. Or, as the two authors assert, the speaker uses *like* to convey the expressive content of his/her imagination rather than the precise words uttered in that circumstance.

This analysis of *like* and *cos* indicates the fact that they do not have only institutionalized functions but they also have innovative group-specific uses that will perhaps become normative themselves.

4. Interviews

There are several types of interviews that differ from the point of view of the constraints that govern the respective exchange. For instance, sociological interviews are structured but they cannot be said to be extremely formal. As any kind of interaction, they involve negotiation which is oriented towards the collaborative construction of speaker roles and the joint construction of the interview itself.

Janet Fuller (2003) analyzes the discourse marker *like* used as a negotiation device in interviews. She provides examples of various interviews in which the discourse marking *like* has the role of establishing common ground between the interviewer and the interviewees who are in the same age range (early 20s to mid-30s). The use of *like* has the role of balancing the power relations between interviewer and respondent but there are cases in which discursive power is claimed back when the interviewer becomes aware of his/her role. The following dialogue illustrates that very clearly:

(A-interviewer, B – respondent. They have been discussing a nearby urban area, St. Louis)
1. A: I mean, I like to refer to St. Louis as a big hick town (laughing)
2. B: (Laughing) The biggest hick town in the Midwest (both laugh)
(Conversation and jokes about St. Louis continue in lines 3-12)
3. B: oh gosh! (both laugh)
4. A: Well, let's see, what, what kind of accommodations do you have these days? *Like*, do you, do you have a house or do you rent an apartment, what is it (.) /that you live in?/ (…)
(in Janet Fuller 2003: 368).

Even though we are dealing with an interview, the language in the first 13 lines is quite informal and the interaction is symmetrical. However, in line 14, the interviewer becomes aware of the discursive role that she has and returns to her attributions. Fuller (2003:369) notices that the discourse marking introduction *well. let's see.* that the interviewer begins her turn with, indicates the fact that there is a list of topics to be covered and this is why she introduces a new topic. Fuller further remarks that by prefacing her next question with *like*, the interviewer returns to a more casual and symmetrical conversational style.

Fuller (2003: 370, 373) claims that *like* is pragmatically useful as it can mark focus, approximation or uncertainty. According to Fuller, *like* is used in modifying questions in the interview, especially when the interviewer has difficulties in getting speakers to talk. *Like* can also be used as a mitigation marker when the interviewer negotiates a longer turn in offering information about herself. Fuller notices that the interviewer's provision of personal information means that the format of the interview has been infringed.

Thus *like* is defined as a functional particle and even though it is considered specific for casual speech or a certain age group, it is unconsciously and strategically used by all speakers. The role of the discourse marker *like* is that of helping both interviewers and interviewees in their work to create or negotiate common ground.

5. Age-based differences in discursive negotiation

Coming back to the assumption that negotiation in discourse does not necessarily involve power issues, we move on to another very important variable that influences speech namely age. This chapter concentrates on the manner in which different age groups construct their verbal contribution in such a way as to attain their conversational goal but also on the importance that discourse markers have in the process.

As it has been argued, young people have an almost stereotyped manner of communication in which all marking or hedging devices play an important part. It is in the discourse of young people that we can encounter new, context-bound functions of discourse markers such as 'like'. The fact that an entire age group uses the same marking items with the same functions means that a jointly created in-group speech manner manages to unify a type a speech in an almost ideologically proliferated manner.

Mary Bucholtz (1999:443) remarks that social categories that have once been considered immutable and unproblematic are constructed via discursive practices. And we might say that this leads to the proliferation of the linguistic identity of the respective social group by means of a language ideology.

5.1. Age-based variation in expressing speaker stance

Following Du Bois (quoted in Trester, 2009: 149) stance can be defined as '*a linguistically articulated form of social action whose meaning is to be construed within the broader scope of language, interaction, and sociocultural value'*. This definition leads us to the conclusion that speaker stance is a form of socially-oriented linguistic negotiation of attitudes in which, according to the literature, discourse markers play an important part. But there are notable differences in the use of stance markers between the discourse of young people and that of older speakers.

Federica Barbieri (2008) argues that there are two major patterns of lexico-grammatical variation according to the age group of the speakers, namely the use of slang and the use of markers indicating speaker stance and involvement.

The speech of young people, Barbieri argues, is characterized by an extensive use of slang, swear words, intensifiers, stance adverbs, discourse markers and personal pronouns whereas the speech of older people is characterized by the marked presence of modals. These patterns indicate a functional difference between the two speech styles. Barbieri (2008:66) stresses the fact that she uses the term 'stance' to refer to the speaker's expression of subjective meanings such as personal attitudes, value judgements and interpersonal involvement.

In this case we are dealing with a more subtle form of discursive negotiation which is oriented towards the proper presentation of ideas (or of stance, in Barbieri's terms) in such a way as to be granted the attention and eventually the approval of the other participants in the interaction.

According to Barbieri's (2008:67) research results, speakers younger than 35 very often use the attention getter *hey* and the exclamation *wow* whereas older speakers favour exclamations *gosh* and *oops.* Another difference that the author remarks is that young people use far more 'polite speech-act formulae' (Biber et al, quoted in Barbieri, 2008:67) such as

sorry and *please* and it is a tendency remarked in the speech of American and British people under 35.

In young people's speech *right* is extensively used in its discourse marking function when it is either used as response token or as a response elicitor. The following fragment illustrates the former function:

> A: Not a whole, not a heck of a lot earlier.
> B: **Right.** And I think you're right, but I just don't know it was like um middle ages but it wasn't quite the medieval time period yet.
> Federica Barbieri (2008: 68)

The discourse marking function of *right* in this conversation is highlighted by the fact that a proper response to the question in provided afterwards (*and I think you're right*). This is why I believe that the function of *right* when used in this manner is that of showing that the hearer acknowledges the speaker's statement and confirms its receipt but not the fact that the hearer agrees with the content of the statement. This is the utterance initial position of *right* which can also occur in final position as in the following example.

> A: Statistics? Because I took statistics, regular statistics.
> B: You mean P STAT SA?
> A: Same thing, **right**?
> B: Basically.
> Federica Barbieri (2008: 68)

In final position, according to Barbieri, *right* functions as a response elicitor. We might add that *right* marks a negotiation of information since its function is that of asking for confirmation or, in other words, of asking for validation of the information provided in the respective turn.

According to the same author, *like* and *just* are the most frequently used discourse markers in youth talk whereas older speakers favour *just, well, okay, yeah, you know, so* in expressing stance. Apparently young people use a relatively small set of items in expressing speaker stance but even though very few, the markers of stance that they use fulfil many functions according to the context in which they are placed. Older speakers, on the other hand, use a great variety of stance markers but with a lower degree of multi-functionality. Another important difference would be that young people prefer non-clausal items (which justify their multi-functionality in discourse) whereas older speakers favour less structurally and functionally flexible clausal items. As a corollary, Barbieri (2008: 79) claims that adults' stance is more specific than youth's stance as the former uses specific markers in their 'institutionalized' functions whereas the latter makes use of a very limited number of discourse markers that can fulfil the most unusual and rare discursive functions (*like* is but one example).

5.2. Reported dialogue and narratives in youth discourse

Galina Bolden (2006:663) notices the fact that discourse markers signal situated language use or stance. Markers have a role both in the demarcation of discourse connections and in indexing social relationships or alignment and misalignment between interlocutors. Moreover, markers are involved in building social and situational identities. This section will relate these aspects to the speech of young people especially in reported speech and narratives.

Deborah Schiffrin (2006) identifies two markers that express speaker stance: *I mean* and *I think*, in the previous section, other markers that fulfil the same function were mentioned

but to this list we can add *oh* which has been defined by Anna Marie Trester (2009:147) as a marker of speaker stance towards quoted material.

Trester argues that the discourse marker *oh*, when placed in initial position, signals the attitude of the speakers towards constructed dialogue thus helping the listener interpret the speaker stance towards the respective quoted material. Heritage and Schiffrin (cited in Trester, 2009: 149) state that discourse markers in general and *oh* in particular fulfil and important information and interactional-management function and signal the speaker's and hearer's orientation not only towards information but also towards each other

In this sense, Trester (2009) identifies the function of *misalignment* that the discourse marker *oh* can fulfil. In such cases, by bracketing reported speech with this marker, speakers position themselves in disagreement with quoted material and align themselves to other participants in the interaction in order to construct a certain cultural and social identity. The following interaction is an example:

1. Josh: one thing that he said was <suck teeth> that I thought was really interesting was like
2. people say like '**oh** I wanna stop thinkin' and you know 'I don't wanna be in my head
3. I wanna think out there'
4. **and** but I mean really if you stop thinking you'd be dead
5. It's pretty hard to like stop thinking so one thing I do is like
6. I like if I: accept the fact that I am going to be thinking
7. but I get myself thinking in like positive ways
8. so rather than thinking like '**oh** I've gotta be funny
9. I've gotta make this scene funny. I've gotta think of the right thing to say'.
10. I'll think like other things that'll y'know like 'you know what? I'm gonna start this
11. scene happy. or 'I'm gonna walk into this scene leading with a certain body part'
12. Anna: mhmm
13. Josh: see where that takes me.
14. Anna: right
15. Josh: or 'I'm gonna just open my mouth and start making a vowel noise
16. and like see what word comes out.'
17. you know stuff that kind of like throws you forward
18. **and** into the moment you know (…)

adapted from Anna Marie Trester (2009: 160)

In both instances, *oh* signals the speaker's disapproval towards the attitude of the people he is quoting. The speaker's contribution contains many hedging devices and discourse markers that signal the attempt of the speaker to involve the listener and to get her approval of the statements issued (*you know, like*).

Given the fact that Josh's turns are quite extended, a high degree of turn negotiation is necessary in order to keep the floor. This is why he signals his intention to continue his turns by discourse marking items such as *and* (4, 18) and he proves to be listener-oriented by the use of discourse marking *you know*.

Jucker and Smith (1998: 196) claim that *you* know is a strategic device which permits the speaker to involve the addressee in a joint construction of a certain representation. The two authors also draw attention to the fact that this marker may or may not mark information which is already known to the addressee and it seems to be marking very important statements in the economy of the argument being made. Hence, the discourse marker *you know* invites the listener to contribute to the completion of the argument by drawing the correct inferences which, even though not verbally confirmed, still acknowledged and exploited as common ground.

This argument is valid for the verbal interaction above. In it, we are dealing with an argument negotiation that involves a refined use of mitigation and hedging devices leading to the addressee's acceptance of the argument. Josh's contribution is what Liddicoat (2007)

calls a 'multi-turn unit' that also requires a negotiation in point of interactional space and, finally, the implicit approval of the listener.

Stephen Levey (2003) refers to narratives of preadolescents in which discourse marking items such as *like, be like, go* are meant to affectively involve the listener in the story which is performed rather than told. Levey claims that the above mentioned pragmatic particles are used to negotiate interpersonal alignment and, at the same time, they mark assumptions of shared knowledge and experience. The following conversation is such a collaborative exchange in which a jointly constructed narrative is created by means of reported speech:

Claire: …**and** then we tell them to shut up
and they go, 'No, you!' and stuff like that.
Jane: … **and** she said, 'Oh, I'd love to have him'
and I went, 'God, if I moved to this school, I'll have to tell him that'
and she went, 'No you're not'.
Stephen Levey (2003: 311)

The narrative is 'performed' by the two speakers who show support for each other by making contributions to the narrative. The discourse marking *and* signals the fact that the floor is claimed but the narrative thread is not disrupted.

6. Concluding remarks

Ajmer, Foolen and Simon-Vanderbergen (2006:107) speak about the *heteroglossic* purpose of markers because they are 'options that allow speakers to express heterogeneity of world views and diverging stances which require communicative remedying and problem-solving' Their considerations depart from Bakhtin's (1981 cited in Ajmer, Foolen, Simon-Vanderbergen, 2006:107) use of the term *heteroglossia* that refers to the existence of different languages or world-views.

The same *heteroglossia* seems to be well-instated in any language of the planet. In the use of markers, it should be viewed as the possible existence of what we could call stereotypical 'marker use dialects' that vary across age, gender, status and social class.

As this paper has shown, it is variables such as age, formal and informal speech settings or the speaker's conversational goal, that influence the manner in which stereotypes are created and proliferated in society. Once created, stereotyped communication performs various functions such as signalling group membership or displaying the linguistic identity of a certain social category.

What is important, judging from the examples provided in this paper, is that the creation of stereotyped patterns of communication is a dynamic process which takes place in conversation. In the case of discourse markers, speakers manage to invent new pragmatic meanings and new functions that eventually become stereotyped through extensive use within a certain category of speakers.

The use of stereotyped communication in general and of a stereotyped use of discourse markers in particular, is not oriented towards generating uniformity in speech but towards the creation of a (linguistic) bond between speakers.

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